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ABSTRACT

Discipline is a major problem in many schools and an important issue to parents and educators alike. Discipline is commonly defined as negative reinforcement--punishment--instead of leadership and good teaching. Its definition should be expanded to relate it to the overall purposes of education. Discipline policy should be integrated with curriculum and instructional programs. Corporal punishment and suspension both have a place in the school discipline policy. The school's philosophy governing these two measures should be clearly stated in writing and made available to all interested parties. A coherent, comprehensive discipline policy to ease racial tensions is especially necessary in newly integrated schools. (DS)

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# "DISCIPLINE, CORPORAL PUNISHMENT, AND SUSPENSION"

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# DISCIPLINE, CORPORAL PUNISHMENT, AND SUSPENSION

## Discipline

Discipline, corporal punishment, and suspensions, in dealing with classroom management, is the greatest single issue facing public school education today. The American public and public school educators in general, undoubtedly all fired up by the widespread student disruption and violent behavior, have cited discipline as the biggest problem of our public schools. Breakdowns in school discipline, of course, makes more negative news stories than any other aspect of school life and trying to cope with a youngster's misbehavior is a problem that all public school educators must tackle. New teachers may be forced to leave the profession for which they have been trained due to their inability to cope with problems of discipline in the classroom. Altogether more experienced teachers who thought they had the answer are throwing up their hands in hopelessness and frustration as they, too, find their students unmanageable. Most public school teachers and educators are more concerned with maintaining good discipline than they are with teaching it.

If the public schools are to succeed, they must address themselves and all of their available resources toward establishing in each and every classroom an atmosphere conducive to teaching and learning and the role of the teacher must be returned to one of learning facilitator. Classroom discipline might be described as methods used by teachers to ensure the students' compliance with certain norms of behavior established for the classroom. These methods basically take two forms--positive, such as praise and rewards, and negative or punishment, such as deprivation of privileges, physical punishment, and isolation.

A newspaper once prophetically announced, by a small misprint which changed an "s" into an "h," that "CLASHES will begin next Tuesday." How true that is, unfortunately. Without discipline, classes turn into clashes between pupil and teacher. The child's impression of education in a disorderly setting is suggested by the reply a boy gave his father after the first day of school. "Well, how did you like school, son?" The boy replied, "I have never been to such a place! There was a lady there who didn't do anything but shout at us to keep quiet."

As a school principal some years ago, I received many referrals from teachers to discipline a youngster or to apply corporal punishment or to suspend the youngster from school. I received notes from teachers that went like this:

Mr. Garza,

This young man makes more noise than a brass band out of tune. See if you can tune him in to Channel E-A-R-S instead of Channel M-O-U-T-H. The Channel M-O-U-T-H has too much static and because of this Channel E-A-R-S can't come in clear.

Mr. Garza,

I have lost my voice yelling so much. Today I'm sending my trouble and noise makers to you. Maybe your backhand swing will do them some good--if not--try the forehand. These boys and 1 girl were not quiet while Mrs. Garza was in my room discussing for about 5 minutes--the play for P.T.A.

Mr. Garza,

These boys and girls are having listening trouble. They Haven't quite gotten the idea that listening comes through the ears, not the big loud mouth. I know their anatomy is just like everybody else's and their ears are attached to their heads, but sometimes I think their ears must be attached to their little toes and they travel away inside their dirty little socks because they just don't seem to hear a thing that is said unless it is to get up out the seat, talk, play, run, leave the room, etc.

Discipline is more than punishment. It is leadership and direction freely and fairly given. Too often we think of discipline in purely negative terms--no noise, no running around, no disturbance. This, of course, is a misunderstanding of the real meaning of discipline. The word comes from the Latin and it means teaching as suggested by the word "disciple," meaning one who is taught. Good discipline basically means good teaching.

There has been much change in public school education in the past five to ten years. Approximately five years ago the Houston Independent School District underwent a massive desegregation program. For the first time in the history of Houston, except in isolated cases, Blacks, Whites, and Browns went to school together. In addition to this, all Black and all White staffs were discarded and a common rationale of Black teachers to White teachers was established in each school. The cross-over of teachers and students in the schools created some problems in the relationship between students and students and between teachers and students. Many of these

problems were generated by societal structures which had legally and officially separated the races. These conditions had alienated races from each other. The result was often misconceptions, stereotypes, and assumptions about the negative acts of teachers of a different race from that of the student.

In the past it was not too difficult for the child brought up in an adult dominated home or even where there was lack of control, to get along fairly well. He or she usually continued to live on in the same community and environment he was used to. His way of life was pretty well determined for him or her, but as I have said before, times have changed. Today we need to prepare our children to work, play, and cooperate with many groups of people. With our present day shifting population and changes of living, our boys and girls must learn to get along with many persons and handle many new problems. As they come to adulthood lacking responsibility and ability to live with others, they will have to learn the hard way--often in a cruel world much different from theirs.

Another factor is that of a changing society, the disintegration of the family unit, and the changing attitude of society. These changes have brought about different behavioral expectations for our students in our schools. I am sure there are many more reasons why student discipline is a critical issue today, and in most major school districts we have added that dimension of Black versus White which has made the topic of student misbehavior more newsworthy.

If we consider discipline so important in our schools today, isn't it time we took a more careful look at what may be happening to it. If we are

to assume that discipline is necessary to maintain order in the classroom and required for teaching and learning, we must devise methods which are sufficiently fair and acceptable that they can be reasonably expected to be effective. If we are to assume that the schools exist for all youngsters and that all youngsters must be kept in school, then it becomes our responsibility to find the rules, techniques of disciplines, and methods of discipline to meet the needs of all youngsters and we know that this is an insurmountable task.

Corporal Punishment

In an article appearing in Education U.S.A., the issue of corporal punishment is mentioned and I quote: "An organized effort to ban corporal punishment in schools is surfacing around the nation but is being met head-on by counter-demands for tougher discipline procedures." Public school educators are most concerned with the issue of corporal punishment and how to regulate student misbehavior or misbehavior without being sued for violating the student's rights, or if sued, without being over-ruled in court. Although different polls have shown that corporal punishment is endorsed by a majority of public school teachers, educators, and parents, there is still a move by some camps to abolish corporal punishment. Undoubtedly all school districts have been or will be asked by their respective communities to re-examine the district's corporal punishment policies. Some individuals will suggest changes in specific portions of the policy while others will demand that corporal punishment be abolished as a disciplinary tool.

Corporal punishment has been defined in the Houston Public Schools as policy that "shall be limited to spanking or paddling the student on the buttocks with a wooden paddle approved by the principal." I use the analogy that some children are like wheelbarrows, wagons, and canoes. Some need to be pushed, some need to be pulled, and some need to be paddled.

I am sure that all school districts have a clear policy as it relates to corporal punishment and I shall be happy to share our policies of the Houston Independent School District as it relates to discipline, corporal punishment, and suspensions.

Physical punishment, or corporal punishment, has been administered in our schools since the beginning of time. I believe most parents, if questioned about corporal punishment, feel that it should be retained in some manner and surveys and polls throughout the country will bear this out; and the usual reply if someone is for or against corporal punishment, is this: Until somebody comes up with another alternative, then I will decide whether corporal punishment is necessary or not.

Most school district policies address the issue of corporal punishment by a number of variables. The punishment must be moderate and not administered maliciously or for the purpose of revenge. What moderate corporal punishment is in any given case is a questionable fact and depends on the size, age, sex, condition, and disposition of the student in the circumstance. Moderation depends on the type of instrument used, the body location struck, and the force used. So there is much controversy as to what is moderate or reasonable, who should do it, and how it should be done.

I will not attempt to offer a model corporal punishment policy because the desires of the community and the Board of Education should dictate the substance of your district's policy. What may be desirable in one district could be totally unacceptable in another. I would, however, recommend that school districts should have:

1. A preliminary statement of philosophy on materials of concern with respect to corporal punishment.
2. A definition of what corporal punishment means.
3. The requirement of parental permission.
4. When it should be administered.
5. By whom to be administered.
6. Where to be administered. Example: specific place.
7. Requirement of witness.
8. Instruments to be used--size, thickness, length, etc.
9. Keep report of punishment on record. Each case should be reported to the Central Office, such as the Superintendent or his designee.

Other provisions may be written relating to the corporal punishment policy as they conform to the state law.

Suspensions

For some time now school officials have always suspended students for misbehavior or misconduct. More and more we deal with the issues of students' rights and his or her right to public school instruction. The philosophy of the

Houston Independent School District is that every student, Kindergarten through 12, should be privileged to attend school every day during the school year in order to be given thorough instruction in all subject areas. Under certain circumstances, however, it becomes necessary to suspend a student from school attendance or assign him to an alternative program for misconduct when other means of correction fails, or if the student is a disruptive force to remove him or her from the school environment.

Every school district and every school should have the rules covering suspension and they should be posted predominantly on a bulletin board in each building and be available to all students, parents, and other interested persons.

In the Houston Independent School District a pupil may be suspended for the following reasons among others:

1. Cutting, defacing or in any way damaging property, real or personal belonging to the School District, its employees or other students.
2. Defiance of the authority of the teacher, principal or supervisor.
3. Stealing, forgery, gambling, hazing or fighting.
4. Possession of any weapon, knife, gun, instrument or article (including fireworks) that might be injurious to person or property.
5. Habitual profanity or vulgarity.
6. Use, sale or possession of narcotics or other dangerous drugs not prescribed by a licensed physician.
7. Use or possession of tobacco or alcoholic beverages in the school, on the school grounds or while involved in school sponsored activities.
8. Participating in any activity which interferes with or disrupts the educational processes.
9. Assaulting or causing bodily injury to an employee of the District or another student.
10. Violation of public law or District or building regulations.

We have often heard of the new math and the new English and we have also heard of behavior modification. Perhaps this could be called the new discipline. Regardless of what we have done up to now, the methods of using corporal punishment and suspension has not worked for some youngsters and certainly suspending a youngster from school does not solve that problem. Suspension is a disciplinary means of controlling unacceptable behavior in the school environment. It is not the answer to the problem of students who act out against school and/or society. An alternative means to suspension must be created. The majority of our students are in school because they want to learn. The few who interrupt, interfere, or disrupt the educational process must be temporarily removed from the environment which causes this particular behavior.

Recommendations

1. Develop a comprehensive Staff Development Program for all teachers and administrators dealing with discipline, corporal punishment, and suspensions.
2. Take a close critical look at the curriculum offerings of all schools.
3. A restructure of the instructional programs K - 12 in all schools.
4. Review the organizational structure of the school district and make sure that it reflects clear, concise channels of communication in the specific assignments of staff and their roles.

5. Transmit to all staff, parents, and students the need for standards and new approaches that can help bring about orderly and reasonable behavior conducive to the teaching-learning environment.
6. Inform parents on how the student is doing and get commitment from (1) the school, (2) the parent, and (3) the student for responsible action to be taken by all.

The success of any change in public school education is directly related to the competencies, skills, and commitment of school administrators. Most changes in the schools occur either through administrator staff initiative or at the very least, through administrator legitimation. Very few changes of any significance can take place without, in some way, involving the school administrators.

The question that again we need to ask ourselves: "Should schools change and if so, how?" What kind of changes are needed and how can this be best brought about?

I feel strongly that the traditional courses in credit format has not been effective and is in some way related to the problems of students in the schools. I also believe that in today's schools the instructional program should be demonstrably competency related to the extent possible and individually paced. I also believe that the initiative and responsibility for any deviation from the traditional approach should rest with the officials of the local education agencies.

Our nation has begun the Bicentennial observance of its independence. This year, 1976, is an appropriate target date for this nation to have in operation

a wide range of instructional programs on educational reform. I firmly believe that as the viability of American schools is enhanced we will, in direct proportion, witness the unfolding of the full splendor and awesome educational power embodied in the unpretentiously phrase concept "We the people of the United States of America" and we, the people in education, can bring solutions to those problems that affect American education today and if we are to live with the concept and the commitment that we are here because of the children, then we must show the children that we care.